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WEEKLY COLUMN

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

Senate works for children, families, jobs and public safety

By Senator Bill Heath



The big news last week in the Georgia General Assembly was the passage of the Senate version of the supplemental '06 budget. Making good on our promise to invest in Georgia's future, the Republican-led Senate has announced the budget improvements that we'll seek for the remainder of the 2006 fiscal year – including adding \$3.6 million to this year's budget for the Katie Beckett Waiver families who were no longer eligible for services under the federal program.

The improved Republican budget concentrates on libraries, job growth, courthouse security, state troopers and the Coverdell Eminent Scholar Program in order to make Georgia a better place to work and live. The amended FY 06 budget passed the Senate by a near-unanimous vote of 52 to 1, and it now goes to the House for its approval.

According to Senate Appropriations Chairman Jack Hill (R-Reidsville), the budget highlights include:

- \$3.6 million for the Katie Beckett Waiver program for ineligible families
- \$2 million for books and materials to be distributed equally to each library system
- Over \$5 million for job growth, including nanotechnology research at Georgia Tech and Emory
- A new office in China to strengthen trade relations

- \$500,000 for grants to assist local sheriffs in the implementation of courthouse security plans
- 25 additional cars for Georgia's State Troopers
- \$500,000 for the *Paul D. Coverdell Eminent Scholar Program* at Georgia College and State University

Senate Budget Improvements:

Provide \$3.6 million for Katie Beckett Waiver

The Senate amended the FY 06 budget to include \$3.6 million for approximately 1,000 children throughout Georgia who were made ineligible for the Waivers under the federal program after Oct.1. This will be the sole funding for these families.

Provide \$2 million for resources and materials for Georgia's Public Libraries

Research shows Georgia's public libraries improve the quality of life for all Georgians. They encourage reading, literacy and education. This investment provides the libraries with needed funds to improve their collections and resources.

Provide \$5 million for Job Growth

Georgia's economic activity continued its dramatic climb in 2005 because of the leadership displayed by the Republican legislature and Governor Sonny Perdue. The state's investments in economic development bore fruit and will continue to bring additional jobs and revenue to Georgia.

GDEcD's Global Commerce division reported that it helped 182 companies in 2005 to either expand or locate facilities in Georgia, compared to 151 companies it worked with in 2004—a 20.5 percent increase. The announced projects mean 15,902 new jobs for Georgians—an increase of more than 35 percent from last year.

The money in the Republican Senate's budget for job growth provides \$5 million for nanotechnology research at Georgia Tech and Emory, and \$500,000 for international trade efforts, including a new office in China to strengthen trade relations.

Provide \$500,000 in grants to assist Sheriffs in the implementation of courthouse security plans

Following the tragic deaths in the Fulton County Courthouse, Georgians awoke to the need for greater security in these buildings. This \$500,000 investment will help to fund the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan for the security of county courthouses across the State.

Provide 25 additional cars for State troopers

Georgia's state troopers play a key role in keeping us safe. They investigate automobile crashes and enforce traffic and criminal laws on our roads and highways. These additional cars are necessary for them to effectively and efficiently perform their duties.

Provide \$500,000 for the Paul Coverdell Eminent Scholar Program at GCSU

Georgia's Eminent Scholar program recruits renowned scientists from many parts of the world adding prestige and scholarship to Georgia's institutions of higher learning. The post will be housed at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville.

We made a commitment to you that we will spend your money wisely. I am confident the Senate budget recommendations do just that, and by working with the members of the House of Representatives we will develop a budget that will benefit all Georgians.

Remember, I work for you and your concerns are my concern. Until next week...

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Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31st Senate District, which includes all of Haralson and Polk Counties and parts of Bartow and Paulding Counties. He may be reached at 404.463.1361, or by email at billheath@billheath.net.